CDC Launches Multi-state Study on Autism; $5.9 Million Awarded to Five Sites

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is initiating a multi-state collaborative study to help identify factors that may put children at risk for autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and other developmental disabilities. Approximately 2,700 children, ages 2 to 5, and their parents will be part of this study.

CDC has awarded a total of $5.9 million to five sites – including the Kaiser Foundation Research Institute in California. The other four sites are the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Johns Hopkins University in Maryland, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and the University of Pennsylvania. These sites make up the Centers for Autism and Developmental Disabilities Research and Epidemiology (CADDRE) Network. CDC will also be participating in the study, and will include children and their parents from the metropolitan Atlanta area.

"We hope this national study will help us learn more about the characteristics of children with ASDs, factors associated with developmental delays, and how genes and the environment may affect child development," said Dr. José F. Cordero, assistant surgeon general and director of CDC's National Center on Birth Defects and Developmental Disabilities.

In this five-year study, *The National CADDRE Study: Child Development and Autism,* a number of factors will be studied for their potential association with ASDs, including:

- infections or abnormal responses to infections in the child, mother or father
- genetic factors in the child, mother and father
- mother's reproductive history
- abnormal hormone function in the child, mother or father
- gastrointestinal problems in the child
- family history of medical and developmental problems
- smoking, alcohol and drug use in pregnancy, and
- parent's occupation and other socio-demographic factors.

The information will be obtained by conducting interviews and exams, reviewing medical records, collecting cheek swabs, and blood and hair sampling.

"By conducting the study in six different geographic areas across the country with diverse populations and by identifying children from multiple sources in each community, we hope to have a study sample that more closely represents children with ASDs, other developmental problems, and typical development across the country," added Cordero.

The CADDRE Network was established following the Children's Health Act of 2000 that directed CDC to establish regional centers of excellence for ASD and other developmental disabilities. ASDs are lifelong developmental disabilities characterized by repetitive behaviors and social and communication problems. ASD includes autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder - not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS, including atypical autism), and Asperger syndrome. People with ASD have significant impairments in social and communication skills, and unusual behaviors or interests. Many people with ASD also have unusual ways of learning, paying attention, or reacting to different sensations. ASD can be diagnosed as early as 18 months and lasts throughout a person's life. For information on CDC's work on autism, please visit www.cdc.gov/autism.